

Fatherhood Initiative

Executive Project Review

June 7th, 2011



Fatherhood Initiative

- **Develop a demonstration program starting in Milwaukee County and 1-2 other counties that support fathers in receiving custody/guardianship of their children.**
- **Plan will focus on the following components:**
 - **Child welfare cases where placement with the child's mother is not a viable permanent home for her children.**
 - **Project would be a joint collaboration project between DCF, courts, local CPS agency, other state agencies and local profit/not for profit agencies.**
 - **Focus would be on finding the father, assessing the father to care for his children and identifying eligible services to support his family.**
- **Build upon successful efforts that have been completed or are in progress by numerous local, state and private/non-profit agencies**

Benefits

Engaging fathers in the lives of their children can have the following benefits:

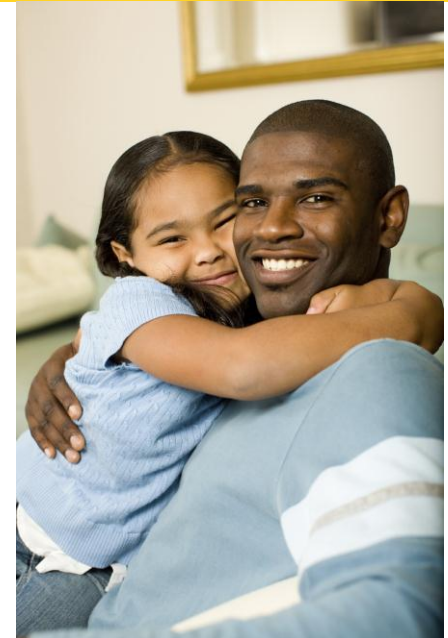
Protects the father's legal rights. The father has a legal right to participate in the proceedings. The father's "late arrival" in the proceedings can affect the outcome for the child and delay permanency. Sometimes the child welfare process must start over to give the father a fair opportunity to reunify with his child. If the father was never notified of the proceedings, even an adoption could be overturned.

Promotes children's social well-being and healthy development.

Research reveals that children have better outcomes when two parents are involved with their upbringing. A father brings different perspectives and attributes from the mother's. A father can help the child understand how he fits into the social scheme of his family and the world around him.

Promotes family connections. The father's family provides an additional resource for the child socially, emotionally, and financially. The father's family, provides a significant number of potential relative connections.

Provides financial resources for the child. A father can bring financial support directly or through child support to the caretaker. The father may also provide health and dental insurance. The father's extended family also offers opportunities for economic support.



Big Picture

- National studies indicate that child welfare agencies and workers often neglect to engage fathers early enough in the case to afford these benefits to children, and sometimes only begin to actively seek or contact a father in order to terminate his parental rights.
- Although child welfare practice seeks to be family-centered, child welfare practice is often mother-centered. According to the Children's Bureau, fathers are not sufficiently involved in case planning in all states.
- No research is currently available to explain the lack of father engagement in child welfare, but it is a nationwide phenomenon. Dr. Fernando Mederos, Director of Special Projects – Fatherhood with the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families observed, “not engaging fathers is an institutionalized practice.” There is growing recognition that, by engaging fathers, child welfare professionals can promote the best interest of the children whom they are meant to protect and serve. Strategies to address the institutionalized practice of not engaging fathers are emerging throughout the country and take many different approaches.
- There is a great opportunity in Wisconsin for the state to partner with local county agencies, non-profits, and others to create a program that helps fathers become engaged in the lives of their children by connecting them with the resources and supports that they need to take care of their children. We have many programs that can help support fathers but often they are not aware of them or engaging in them seems complex, cumbersome, and confusing.

Expected Results

Overall Outcomes

- **Fathers that may have otherwise not been indentified through the child welfare system are indentified as a viable permanency option for the family.**
- **State and local organizations work together to streamline the process of receiving services from state and local sources.**
- **Fathers become a viable economic support for their family and community**
- **Increase in permanency for children**

Approach

Phase I- Initial Assessment

- **Identify the resources, agencies and stakeholders to implement the project**
- **Analyze data to understand the potential magnitude of the issue**
- **Understand the system and processes a father would have to navigate in the child welfare system and other support systems to become a permanency option for his family**

Phase II- Pilot Development

- **Develop a demonstration pilot complete with processes and services**

Phase III- Program Development

- **Develop a comprehensive plan with funding and resources to implement the pilot**

Phase IV- Implementation

- **Implement the pilot in Milwaukee county**

Phase V- Evaluation



Funding

- Casey Family Programs has committed approximately \$25,000 for this project.
- There are also potential grants that we may be able to pursue and are in the process of identifying.
- We will need to identify current department resources and budget to support the project.